

Adoption Matters

Inspection report for voluntary adoption agency

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Inspector	Sean White
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Date of last inspection	24 May 2004

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About this inspection

The purpose of this inspection is to assure children and young people, parents, the public, local authorities and government of the quality and standard of the service provided. The inspection was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000.

This report details the main strengths and any areas for improvement identified during the inspection. The judgements included in the report are made in relation to the outcome for children set out in the Children Act 2004 and relevant National Minimum Standards for the establishment.

The inspection judgements and what they mean

Outstanding:	this aspect of the provision is of exceptionally high quality
Good:	this aspect of the provision is strong
Satisfactory:	this aspect of the provision is sound
Inadequate:	this aspect of the provision is not good enough

Service information

Brief description of the service

The agency has been established since April 2007, in its current model, following a merger with another voluntary adoption service with premises in Blackburn. Prior to the merger both agencies had been established for many years. The agency undertakes all the required work in respect of the recruitment, preparation, assessment and approval of adopters, both domestic and inter-country. It also undertakes a range of adoption support services, including birth records counselling and intermediary work. It is managed centrally but operates from three sites, Chester, Blackburn and Hale.

Summary

This is an organisation that places the wellbeing and safety of children at the centre of its operations. Its approach to the recruitment and assessment of prospective adopters is very well considered, very thorough and focuses on the potential of families to provide homes for children with complex and difficult circumstances. The approach to providing support services is equally impressive in that each service user receives a bespoke service that is negotiated to meet their individual needs and is delivered in a sensitive, thorough and very professional way. These services are provided by very experienced, knowledgeable and skilled workers who demonstrate significant understanding of adoption issues and who carry out their duties and responsibilities with great care and commitment. They are managed by people who are well qualified and who have substantial backgrounds in social work with children and adoption. The management and administrative arrangements are grounded in efficient systems and practices that provide a very strong framework within which the service operates. The outcomes for children placed with this agency's adopters are very optimistic.

The overall quality rating is outstanding.

This is an overview of what the inspector found during the inspection.

Improvements since the last inspection

Following the last inspection there were ten recommendations made. Some of these related to the adoption panel and some to administrative issues. All of the panel issues have been addressed, and in most cases the improvements have gone beyond what was required; the administrative matters have also been dealt with very efficiently by a team of workers who demonstrated a very thorough approach to systems management.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is not judged.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is outstanding.

This is an agency that is clearly focused on ensuring that children have the best possible, safe life chances through placement and adoption with families that have been recruited to meet a wide range of complex needs. The written recruitment strategy and the practices of the service clearly demonstrate a commitment to finding people who are able to provide permanent homes for children that have difficult circumstances. The preparation and assessment of adopters is particularly thorough and rigorous and is carried out by very experienced, skilled and knowledgeable workers. They demonstrate a committed and enthusiastic approach to ensuring

that families recruited as prospective adopters undergo a full and detailed assessment of their parenting capacity. The models used to determine suitability are analytical and are aimed at preparing families to adopt children whose backgrounds are complex and circumstances difficult. The workers in the agency go to great lengths to ensure that adopters approach being linked and matched to children in a careful way and make efforts to ensure that adopters are fully informed about the children they may be considering. They work closely with placing social workers to obtain all necessary and relevant information which enables well considered decisions to be made. The service has a very low disruption rate. The approach to thoroughness is continued by the appropriately constituted and very efficiently administered adoption panels. They are chaired by people who have significant and wide experience of adoption issues and who are clearly focused on best outcomes for children. They ensure that the panels undertake their responsibilities seriously, focus on children's needs and bring a diligent approach to their scrutiny of the assessments done by the agency. This enables the decision maker to be confident about the recommendations he receives and provides him with the information he requires to approve suitable adopters. Although the records of adoption panels have full minutes and give a very clear overview of the panels' deliberations, they do not consistently make explicit the reasons for the recommendations. The manager (Chief Executive) of the agency, and the team managers, have an impressive background in social work with children and adoption; all have been in post for many years, are fully qualified and very knowledgeable. The workers in the service demonstrate, both individually and collectively, wide experience and deep knowledge of adoption issues, including current thinking and legislation. They are all fully qualified and the agency has an impressive approach to the Post Qualifying Child Care Award, which many workers have achieved, and most have gained at least the PQ 1. Similarly, the agency actively promotes training and makes available regular and wide ranging opportunities for staff to develop their skills and knowledge; this includes external courses and regular child protection training. The practices, underpinned by strong policies and procedures, in respect of the recruitment and employment of workers are of a very high standard. This includes both employed staff and those undertaking contractual, sessional work. The agency has a strong approach to the protection of children, and others, from harm or neglect. It has a well presented child protection policy and a business plan that states a commitment to inclusion and anti-discriminatory practice.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

The agency has a clear strategy for supporting adopters that have a child or children in placement. This support begins prior to placement and continues throughout and until after the adoption order is made, if necessary or appropriate. It is of a high standard, both in terms of quality and frequency, and highly appreciated by adopters. The service has access to a range of specialist advisers or agencies to assist in the continuing support of adoptive placements. This enables the agency to be responsive to a variety of needs, given the complex demands made on adopters. The medical advisers are regular attendees at the panel and there is advice readily available from the legal adviser. The panels also have members with particular specialist backgrounds that add a further dimension to the advice available to the agency. The support provided to people affected by adoption is very well considered, and is delivered as a bespoke service. People have their needs assessed by the agency and a support package is detailed from this. The support is provided by experienced and skilled workers who understand the effects of adoption on adopted adults and birth families; recipients of such services are highly appreciative of the standard of support and the qualities of workers.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is not judged.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is not judged.

Organisation

The organisation is outstanding.

This agency is a very well managed and administered organisation that promotes the wellbeing of children as its prime motivator. The statement of purpose makes this explicit and it is underpinned by strong policies and procedures, and a focused business plan. The strength of the management and administration is demonstrated in the information provided for, and available to, prospective applicants. It outlines clearly the adoption process and what people can expect from the agency; it is also provided in a timely way and indicates clearly the inclusive nature of the service and how people from all sectors of the community are welcome. The manager and the management team, supported by a committed board of trustees, are well qualified, high calibre individuals that promote good quality and efficient practice. The organisation of the agency is very well structured with all required and necessary components in place to ensure smooth operational practice. This is driven by a clear business plan that gives focus and direction to the service. Monitoring and overall control of the agency is through the board of trustees; in addition to the regular reports it receives on the work of the service, it provides a supportive and interested overview within which operations can be undertaken with confidence. The workers of the agency are very well supported to carry out their duties and responsibilities. The systems in place for the allocation and management of workload are fair and efficient and provide for staff being able to undertake their work in a supportive and efficient way. Workers' skills and experience are recognised as key resources in the agency and are utilised and encouraged to the best advantage of people applying to adopt or receiving adoption support. There are sufficient staff to undertake the range of duties the service has to manage and the structural arrangements for team management are very efficiently organised. The administrative support for the service is impressive, with very experienced and qualified workers managing exceptionally efficient systems. The staff retention record of the agency is also impressive with many workers having been in post for many years. The case records on prospective adopters, approved adopters and people receiving adoption support are well maintained and include all required information. Although the case files are well presented, suitably indexed and provide a clear and accurate overview of the subject, there is no systematic process for auditing them. Other administrative records were maintained to a very high standard; this includes personnel records on all staff, whether employed or contracted, and panel members. The agency operates on three sites. The premises are suitably located and are equipped to a high standard. Information technology resources are very good, including secure remote working facilities for home-based staff. The premises are spacious and provide good accommodation for workers. All required insurance liabilities are in place. The premises are secure and there is a disaster recovery plan in place. The board of trustees and the Chief Executive are clear about the importance of financial viability and manage the agency with this in mind; the accounts are audited every year and there is a continuing surplus. The financial management and administration, as in all other administrative systems in the agency, are very well controlled by experienced personnel.

What must be done to secure future improvement?

Statutory requirements

This section sets out the actions, which must be taken so that the registered person meets the Care Standards Act 2000, and the National Minimum Standards. The Registered Provider must comply with the given timescales.

Standard	Action	Due date
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Recommendations

To improve the quality and standards of care further the registered person should take account of the following recommendation(s):

- include, in panel minutes, the reasons why the recommendation is being made (NMS 12.3)
- develop a formal system for auditing case files to monitor their quality and adequacy. (NMS 27.3)

Annex

Annex A

National Minimum Standards for voluntary adoption agency